CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

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1. A machine for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said machine comprising:

a manually operable input unit for input of data and operating commands;

a document printer unit for printing readable information on document forms based on data inputted at said input unit, said document printer unit comprising

a document form storage receptacle for holding the document forms prior to being printed,

an ink jet printer for printing the readable information on the documents to produce completed documents, and

a feed mechanism for feeding the document forms in succession from said receptacle to said printer and for dispensing printed documents from said machine after having been printed by said printer; and

a control unit coupled to said input unit and said printer unit for controlling operation of said printer unit in response to data and commands inputted at said input unit.

2. The machine according to claim 1 wherein each document form carries a bar code, and said machine further comprises an optical reader in said printer unit for reading the bar code on each document form.

3. The machine according to claim 2 wherein:

said feed mechanism is operative to feed document forms in succession in a feed direction through said printer;

said printer comprises a print head for dispensing ink to form the printed information on the document forms;

said print head is mounted in said printer for movement in a scanning direction while dispensing the ink;

the scanning direction is transverse to the feed direction; and

said optical reader is mounted for movement with said print head.

4. The machine according to claim 3 wherein said printer contains a supply of magnetic ink to be dispensed by said print head.

5. The machine according to claim 3 wherein said optical reader is coupled to said control unit for supplying to said control unit data obtained from reading bar code patterns printed on the document forms.

6. The machine according to claim 1 wherein said feed mechanism is constructed and operative for feeding the document forms in a single direction from said storage receptacle through said printer and from said machine.

7. The machine according to claim 1 wherein said control unit comprises a program-controlled data processing device.

8. The machine according to claim 7 wherein said data processing device comprises:

a central processing unit containing a microprocessor operable in response to program instructions;

input/output means connected for receiving the data and operating commands inputted at said input unit and for supplying data and control signals to said printer unit; and

memory means for storing the program instructions for said microprocessor and for receiving and storing data received by said input/output means.

9. The machine according to claim 8 in combination with a plurality of the document forms held in said receptacle, and wherein each of the document forms is a preprinted form provided with information uniquely identifying that document.

10. The machine according to claim 9 wherein the information uniquely identifying each document is in the form of a bar code, and said machine further comprises an optical reader disposed for reading the bar code on each document and having an output coupled to said input/output means for supplying data uniquely identifying each document.

11. The machine according to claim 10 wherein each document is printed to have a monetary value determined by the data inputted at said input device, and said central processing unit is operative to store in said memory means data received by said input/output means from said input device and representing the monetary value of each document, together with data received by said input/output means from said optical reader for the same document.

12. The machine according to claim 8 in combination with a plurality of the document forms held in said receptacle, and wherein each of said document forms is a blank form and said printer contains a supply of magnetic ink to be dispensed by said print head.

13. The machine according to claim 1 wherein said input device comprises a data reader for reading data stored in machine readable form on a data storage medium.

14. The machine according to claim 1 wherein:

each document is printed to have a monetary value determined by the data inputted at said input device;

said machine further comprises a memory connected for storing data representing the monetary value of each document and data representing the cumulative monetary value of a succession of documents; and

said machine further comprises a communication interface coupled to said memory for transmitting the data stored in said memory to a central location remote from said machine.

15. The machine according to claim 14 wherein said control unit is operative to receive authorization instructions from the central location via said interface and to block dispensing of printed documents when the cumulative monetary value exceeds a predetermined value and an authorization instruction to dispense further printed documents has not been received by said control unit.

16. The machine according to claim 15 further comprising a time keeping device, and wherein said control device is operative under control of said time keeping device for blocking dispensing of printed documents when no transmission of the data stored in said memory to the central station has occurred for a predetermined period of time.

17. The machine according to claim 15 further comprising a time keeping device, and wherein said control device is operative under control of said time keeping device for blocking dispensing of printed documents when reception of an authorization instruction from the central station has not occurred for a predetermined period of time.

18. The machine according to claim 1 further comprising: a communication interface for conducting communications with a central location remote from said machine; and a time keeping device, and wherein said control unit is operative to receive authorization instructions from the central location via said interface, and said control device is operative under

control of said time keeping device for blocking dispensing of printed documents when reception of an authorization instruction from the central station has not occurred for a predetermined period of time.

19. A machine for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said machine comprising:

a manually operable input unit for input of data and operating commands;

a document printer unit for printing readable information on document forms based on data inputted at said input unit, said document printer unit comprising

a document form storage receptacle for holding the document forms prior to being printed,

a printer for printing the readable information on the documents to produce completed documents, and

a feed mechanism for feeding the document forms in succession from said receptacle to said printer and for dispensing printed documents from said machine after having been printed by said printer; and

a control unit coupled to said input unit and said printer unit for controlling operation of said printer unit in response to data and commands inputted at said input unit,

wherein each document form carries a bar code, and said machine further comprises an optical reader in said printer unit for reading the bar code on each document form.

20. The machine according to claim 19 wherein:

said feed mechanism is operative to feed document forms in succession in a feed direction through said printer;

said printer comprises a print head for dispensing ink to form the printed information on the document forms;

said print head is mounted in said printer for movement in a scanning direction while dispensing the ink;

the scanning direction is transverse to the feed direction; and

said optical reader is mounted for movement with said print head.

21. The machine according to claim 20 wherein said optical reader is coupled to said control unit for supplying to said control unit data obtained from reading bar code patterns printed on the document forms.

22. A machine for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said machine comprising:

a manually operable input unit for input of data and operating commands;

a document printer unit for printing readable information on document forms based on data inputted at said input unit, said document printer unit comprising

a document form storage receptacle for holding the document forms prior to being printed,

a printer for printing the readable information on the documents to produce completed documents, and

a feed mechanism for feeding the document forms in succession from said receptacle to said printer and for dispensing printed documents from said machine after having been printed by said printer; and

a control unit coupled to said input unit and said printer unit for controlling operation of said printer unit in response to data and commands inputted at said input unit,

wherein said printer contains a supply of magnetic ink with which the readable information is printed on the document forms.

23. A machine for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said machine comprising:

a manually operable input unit for input of data and operating commands;

a document printer unit for printing readable information on document forms based on data inputted at said input unit, said document printer unit comprising

a document form storage receptacle for holding the document forms prior to being printed,

a printer for printing the readable information on the documents to produce completed documents, and

a feed mechanism for feeding the document forms in succession from said receptacle to said printer and for dispensing printed documents from said machine after having been printed by said printer; and

a control unit coupled to said input unit and said printer unit for controlling operation of said printer unit in response to data and commands inputted at said input unit,

wherein said control unit comprises a program-controlled data processing device.

24. The machine according to claim 23 wherein said data processing device comprises:

a central processing unit containing a microprocessor operable in response to program instructions;

input/output means connected for receiving the data and operating commands inputted at said input unit and for supplying data and control signals to said printer unit; and

memory means for storing the program instructions for said microprocessor and for receiving and storing data received by said input/output means.

25. The machine according to claim 24 in combination with a plurality of the document forms held in said receptacle, and wherein each of the document forms is a preprinted form provided with information uniquely identifying that document.

26. The machine according to claim 25 wherein the information uniquely identifying each document is in the form of a bar code, and said machine further comprises an optical reader disposed for reading the bar code on each document and having an output coupled to said input/output means for supplying data uniquely identifying each document.

27. The machine according to claim 26 wherein each document is printed to have a monetary value determined by the data inputted at said input device, and said central processing unit is operative to store in said memory means data received by said input/output means from said input device and representing the monetary value of each document, together with data received by said input/output means from said optical reader for the same document.

28. The machine according to claim 24 in combination with a plurality of the document forms held in said receptacle, and wherein each of said document forms is a blank form and said printer contains a supply of magnetic ink to be dispensed by said print head.

29. A machine for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said machine comprising:

a manually operable input unit for input of data and operating commands;

a document printer unit for printing readable information on document forms based on data inputted at said input unit, said document printer unit comprising

a document form storage receptacle for holding the document forms prior to being printed,

a printer for printing the readable information on the documents to produce completed documents, and

a feed mechanism for feeding the document forms in succession from said receptacle to said printer and for dispensing printed documents from said machine after having been printed by said printer; and

a control unit coupled to said input unit and said printer unit for controlling operation of said printer unit in response to data and commands inputted at said input unit,

wherein said input device comprises a data reader for reading data stored in machine readable form on a data storage medium.

30. A machine for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said machine comprising:

a manually operable input unit for input of data and operating commands;

a document printer unit for printing readable information on document forms based on data inputted at said input unit, said document printer unit comprising

a document form storage receptacle for holding the document forms prior to being printed,

a printer for printing the readable information on the documents to produce completed documents, and

a feed mechanism for feeding the document forms in succession from said receptacle to said printer and for dispensing

printed documents from said machine after having been printed by said printer; and

a control unit coupled to said input unit and said printer unit for controlling operation of said printer unit in response to data and commands inputted at said input unit, wherein:

each document is printed to have a monetary value determined by the data inputted at said input device;

said machine further comprises a memory connected for storing data representing the monetary value of each document and data representing the cumulative monetary value of a succession of documents; and

said machine further comprises a communication interface coupled to said memory for transmitting the data stored in said memory to a central location remote from said machine.

31. The machine according to claim 30 wherein said control unit is operative to receive authorization instructions from the central location via said interface and to block dispensing of printed documents when the cumulative monetary value exceeds a predetermined value and an authorization instruction to dispense further printed documents has not been received by said control unit.

32. The machine according to claim 31 further comprising a time keeping device, and wherein said control device is operative under control of said time keeping device for blocking dispensing of printed documents when no transmission of the data stored in said memory to the central station has occurred for a predetermined period of time.

33. The machine according to claim 31 further comprising a time keeping device, and wherein said control device is operative under control of said time keeping device for blocking dispensing of printed documents when reception of an authorization instruction from the central station has not occurred for a predetermined period of time.

34. A machine for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said machine comprising:

a manually operable input unit for input of data and operating commands;

a document printer unit for printing readable information on document forms based on data inputted at said input unit, said document printer unit comprising

a document form storage receptacle for holding the document forms prior to being printed,

a printer for printing the readable information on the documents to produce completed documents, and

a feed mechanism for feeding the document forms in succession from said receptacle to said printer and for dispensing printed documents from said machine after having been printed by said printer;

a control unit coupled to said input unit and said printer unit for controlling operation of said printer unit in response to data and commands inputted at said input unit;

a communication interface for conducting communications with a central location remote from said machine; and

a time keeping device, and wherein

said control unit is operative to receive authorization instructions from the central location via said interface, and said control device is operative under control of said time keeping device for blocking dispensing of printed documents when reception of an authorization instruction from the central station has not occurred for a predetermined period of time.

35. A method for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said method comprising:

inputting data and operating commands via a manually operable input unit;

providing a plurality of document forms each printed with a bar code;

feeding a succession of document forms from a document form storage receptacle to a document printer and printing readable information on each successive document form based on data inputted at the input unit;

reading the bar code on each document form with an optical reader when the form is in the printer; and

dispensing each form, after printing, from the document printer.

36. A method for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said method comprising:

inputting data and operating commands via a manually operable input unit;

feeding a succession of document forms from a document form storage receptacle to a document printer;

printing on each successive document form, in the printer with magnetic ink, readable information based on data inputted at the input unit; and

dispensing each form, after printing, from the document printer.

37. A method for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said method comprising:

inputting data and operating commands via a manually operable input unit;

reading data stored in machine readable form on a data storage medium in a data reader forming part of the manually operable input unit;

feeding a succession of document forms from a document form storage receptacle to a document printer and printing readable information on each successive document form based on data inputted at the input unit and data read in the data reader; and

dispensing each form, after printing, from the document printer.

38. A method for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said method comprising:

inputting data and operating commands via a manually operable input unit;

feeding a succession of document forms from a document form storage receptacle to a document printer and printing readable information on each successive document form, the readable information assigning a monetary value to the document form based on data inputted at the input unit;

dispensing each form, after printing, from the document printer;

storing data representing the monetary value of each document and data representing the cumulative monetary value of a succession of documents in a memory;

establishing communication between a remote location and a communication interface coupled to the memory, and transmitting the data stored in the memory to the remote location.

39. A method for preparing and dispensing documents relating to financial transactions, said method comprising:

inputting data and operating commands via a manually operable input unit;

feeding a succession of document forms from a document form storage receptacle to a document printer and printing readable information on each successive document form based on data inputted at the input unit;

dispensing each form, after printing, from the document printer

establishing communication between a remote location and a communication interface;

periodically transmitting authorization instructions from the remote location to the communication interface; and

blocking dispensing of printed documents when reception of an authorization instruction from the remote location has not occurred for a predetermined period of time.